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Cubans Return Pilot and Pair Of Hijackers

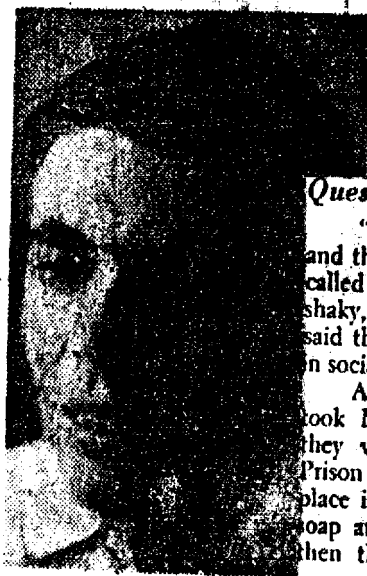
By Gene Miller

Newsday Special Correspondent

Miami—A pilot and the two men who forced him to fly to Cuba at gunpoint eight days ago were returned to Miami yesterday. The pilot came back to freedom, but for his two ex-passengers it was a flight from one jail to another.

The alleged hijackers were arrested by the FBI on kidnapping charges as they stepped off a commercial flight from Havana. They were later held in \$25,000 bail. Both had told pilot Woodruff Mead that they fled to Communist Cuba for ideological reasons. The Cuban government, without explanation, released them from jail and returned them yesterday along with Mead. The Cubans gave no indication about what they would do with the hijacked plane, owned by American Airway Inc. of Miami.

Mead, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Richard J. Mead of 74 Argyle Road, Albertson, L.I., said, "boy, I glad to get back. I never did figure these two guys out. The suspects, identified as Malcolm Oeth, 34, and Thomas Healy, 31, both big yesterday at court."



Woodruff Mead

Mead and Healy, using assumed names, rented the plane April 10. Mead said they wanted to take a sightseeing flight over Miami. Mead said, once they were in the air, "this guy (Oeth) stuck a knife behind my neck next to my right ear. I thought it was a joke at first. We were just off Miami Beach. Then, he said, 'Fly to Cuba.' I saw the bullets in the chamber and I was so scared I jumped out. Moore (Healy) reached over and shut off the radio. The 23-year-old Mead then said he tried to warn them that one of his single-engine Cessna would be a federal violation. I got over in two hours and 20 minutes," Mead said. "I was about (Cuban) MIGs shooting us down. But we got in OK. When we came down, there were those big machine guns staring me in the face, just Cuban kids holding toy guns—only they weren't."

Questioned by Intelligence

"They turned all of us over to the G-2 (military intelligence) and they accused me of being a CIA agent, the FBI—the works. They called me an American capitalist . . . this Moore (Healy) got a little shaky, but the big guy (Oeth) just stood there like a rock . . . they said they were sorry they got me into this mess, but said they believed in socialism . . . I don't know whether they were nuts or not."

After taking his money, about \$12, and his papers, the Cubans took Mead and the others to G-2 headquarters in Havana where they were kept for five days. Then they were taken to Principe Prison where the survivors of last year's invasion are being held. "That place is right out of the Middle Ages, unbelievable," Mead said. "No soap and just a big pot to eat from. I was there for five hours and then they took us to Cuban immigration and deported us."

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